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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 7302
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4406
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9418
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 3712
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003387

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: PRO-THAKSIN DEMONSTRATIONS FAIL TO GAIN STEAM

REF: A. OSC SEP20070617127001 (THAKSIN'S ADDRESS)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3354 (BANGKOK HEATS UP)

BANGKOK 00003387 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Demonstrations of support for deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra have drawn large crowds to Bangkok's Royal Grounds (Sanam Luang), but have yet to acquire momentum akin to that of the 2006 rallies that helped pave the way for Thaksin's ouster. Political officers and local staff observed firsthand the rallies June 14-16. In a video message shown on large screens at the Royal Grounds, Thaksin portrayed himself as a pro-democracy victim but did not call for direct confrontation with the Generals that overthrew him. Heavy rains on June 16 reduced the size of the crowd but did not dissuade a core group of enthusiastic protesters. The demonstration leaders currently do not appear capable of advancing their stated objective of ousting the Council for National Security (CNS), but they may hope to constrain the CNS or take advantage of the Generals' future missteps. So far, however, they do not appear to present a serious challenge. We hope the CNS realizes this, and refrains from overreaction to the continuing protest rallies. End Summary.

DAAD, LIKE PAD -- BUT PEOPLE NOT MAD

[1](#)2. (SBU) Pro-Thaksin activists have announced they will hold daily rallies until June 24 to support the deposed Prime Minister (ref B); their methods seem intended to emulate those of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), which created an atmosphere of political crisis in last year, paving the way for the military to oust Thaksin. On Friday, June 15, the Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship (DAAD) organized the screening of an address by Thaksin. (Note: In January, the authorities censored broadcasts of Thaksin's interview with CNN. The press continues to report on the statements of Thaksin's supporters, although coverage is limited. Thai dailies presented quotes from Thaksin's address in their June 16 editions but only a few carried lengthy excerpts. End Note.)

13. (SBU) In a prerecorded presentation, Thaksin, seated at a small desk wedged against a wall, spoke in a tired voice. He began by discussing the recent government decision to freeze his assets, which he said he had acquired legitimately. He then noted he had entered politics to work to benefit the Thai people, only to be ousted by a coup. Stressing his desire for Thailand to hold elections soon and return to democracy, Thaksin said he would fight to restore his good name, but he did not call for confrontation with the authorities, and he reiterated his commitment to leave political life. Citing the King's advanced age, he called for national unity and reconciliation. (Ref A provides the complete text of his remarks.) According to an MFA source, the CNS and other parts of the government saw the recording before it was broadcast and approved it. Another source claimed that the recording have been edited and censored, but it did not appear to us to have been cut in any way.

14. (SBU) The crowd responded positively to Thaksin's address, providing moderately enthusiastic applause. The audience -- estimated at close to 20,000 by one senior police officer on the scene -- seemed in no danger of being carried away by emotion. As soon as Thaksin's remarks concluded, attendees began melting away, although thousands remained seated on the ground to hear DAAD leader Veera Musigapong -- not a particularly charismatic orator -- ramble on at length about the need to restore democracy.

REVOLUTION DELAYED BY RAIN

15. (SBU) DAAD leaders had threatened on June 16 to lead the crowd to march on Army Headquarters. The announcement provoked high levels of anxiety and daily meetings of the police to plan how to handle the crowd. There was speculation that one side or the other might provoke some

BANGKOK 00003387 002.2 OF 002

kind of violent confrontation to use for their own ends: Thaksin supporters to discredit the CNS/government; the CNS to invoke a state of emergency and perhaps delay the elections. Whatever evil plans may have been in mind, nature intervened. The crowd that gathered Saturday was the largest pro-Thaksin protest so far -- a little larger than last weekend, perhaps over 25,000 -- until the rain started. Half the crowd departed quickly, leaving the speakers to improvise until they finally announced that the crowd would not march anywhere that evening. As on Friday, the crowd did not initially seem all that enthusiastic, and we suspect that many were curious on-lookers, moderate Thaksin supporters, paid participants, or undercover policemen. However, the 8-10,000 or so who stayed on during the torrential downpour appeared to be true believers, shouting out approval for the speaker and condemnation of the CNS.

16. (SBU) DAAD organizers presented a petition to the CNS on June 17, giving them three days to enter into negotiations or face a massive protest march. They suggested a debate with the Generals at the protest site. They also announced that they have a "secret tape" that is somehow detrimental to the CNS, and they will show it on June 24. The CNS spokesman declined the debate invitation, but underscored that the CNS/government was committed to elections in December, so rallies to call for their removal were unnecessary.

COMMENT

17. (C) Given the authorities' repeated promises that elections will take place by the year's end, many Thais in fact do not feel they need to join demonstrations in order to restore democracy. However, DAAD leaders are clearly focused not solely on democracy, but on Thaksin's personal interests, and we would not rule out their engineering provocative or destabilizing acts, if they judge those as being in Thaksin's

interest. Despite their limited support, the DAAD may also hope their activities will help prevent the military from even contemplating a delay of elections. One contact assessed the weekend as a great success for the Generals, as the DAAD's threat of a showdown fizzled. Thaksin's speech was less a fiery call to arms and more a plaintive bleat. The DAAD seems unable to muster a crowd large enough to use more than a third of Sanam Luang, which had been filled with anti-Thaksin protesters last year. We hope the CNS realizes that they have the upper hand provided they adhere to their timetable for elections by the end of the year. As long as they do, there appears to be insufficient opposition or threats to public order to justify unusual measures, such as the declaration of a state of emergency or even selected reimposition of martial law.

BOYCE